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In Which Hansel Is Gretel and Gretel Is Hansel

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BRANDI WELLS

*In Which Hansel Is Gretel and Gretel Is Hansel*



**T**his hurts a lot, but it's true. It is astral projection gone wrong. It is her body in his body and his body in her body and it is not sexual. Not every time you are inside a person is sexual. There is birth and surgery and dentistry and bulge or wetness or at least it's a different kind of wetness. Gretel looks at her face in the mirror and she sees Hansel. She does it every day. Touches her nose and eyebrows. Slides a finger inside her mouth and it's his mouth. His teeth. Beard hairs on her chin. A few above her lips. She thinks: bleach. She thinks: depilatory cream. Wax. But even smooth-faced, it is Hansel's face.

The way Hansel handles the situation is Hansel doesn't look in mirrors. He is Gretel, but he never sees he is Gretel, so for him, it is the same as being Hansel.

We place them in a cage in the middle of town. Children pay five dollars to feed Hansel a bit of dried jerky or to pet Gretel's hair. The children are never sure who they're petting. Often the children feed and pet the wrong Hansel and Gretel. Children are notorious error-makers. The first and greatest error is that children exist at all; their lives are a series of smaller errors.

Let's hope they grow smaller. Smaller and smaller. I do not care if it is gradual or sudden or surprising in any way. Just that they'll grow smaller and I will either not notice them or crush them.

Before we allow Hansel and Gretel to sleep, we ask that they hold hands and spin in circles. They spin so fast their bodies blur together. Hansel's arm, Gretel's face, their torsos, all skewed and unclear.

We set up bleachers around the cage so people might rest comfortably while they watch. Vendors sell cotton candy and popcorn and roasted turkey legs that are actually emu legs because emu legs are much larger than turkey legs.

We continue our watching every day in hopes we will understand. In hopes of separating the two, scientifically, mathematically, religiously, through whatever dirty process we can think up. And trust me, we have spent our entire lives thinking dirty. We think about insides and outsides and putting the insides out and the outsides in.